

Advertising Sign Control on Washington State Highways



Washington State
Department of Transportation



Overview

State law regulates advertising signs erected on private property and visible to most state highways, including the Interstate system.

Washington state first enacted advertising sign control laws in 1961, to regulate signs visible to Interstate highways. In 1971 amending legislation expanded advertising sign control to primary state highways, which are the more significant state routes. Since

1961 the laws have also regulated advertising signs on private property that are visible to scenic highways.

The provisions of law reside in the Highway Advertising Control Act, Revised Code of Washington (RCW), Chapter 47.42, and companion Rules adopted by the Department of Transportation into the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), Chapter 468-66.

What are advertising signs?

The Highway Advertising Control Act defines advertising signs as anything that's designed, intended, or used to advertise or inform. Most people are familiar with the everyday term "billboards".

Why regulate advertising signs?

The Highway Advertising Control Act declares that sign control adjacent to state highways is necessary to assure that information of interest to the traveling public is presented safely and effectively, and to conserve the natural beauty of our roadsides.

Thus advertising sign regulations create a balance between offering a reasonable advertising opportunity and avoiding sign clutter detrimental to the visual environment. For signs visible to public roadways, regulations further assure that drivers aren't presented with so much information that they're distracted from the driving task.

What does the Highway Advertising Control Act mean by “conserve the natural beauty of our roadsides”?

In scenic areas, the law envisions:

This



Not this



What types of advertising signs are there?

Advertising signs are primarily on-premise or off-premise types, although there are sub-categories of each. An on-premise sign advertises or informs about goods or services available on the property where the sign is located. An off-premise sign advertises or informs about goods or services available at some other location.

The Highway Advertising Control Act authorizes these eight types of signs:

Type 1.

Directional or other official signs and notices. These signs are used to carry out an official duty or responsibility. They may be installed on private property, or public property except state highway right of way. They are not official traffic control signs.

Type 2.

For sale or lease signs. These are real estate signs on the property for sale or lease.

Type 3.

On-premise signs. There are four sub-categories: on-premise signs, business complex on-premise signs, future site on-premise signs, and temporary political campaign signs.

Type 4.

Off-premise signs. These are located within 12 air miles of the advertised activity.

Type 5.

Off-premise signs. These are of specific interest to travelers, and do not have the 12 mile stipulation associated with Type 4 signs.

Type 6.

Landmark signs. These are historic signs, of which none remain in Washington.

Type 7.

Public service signs on school bus shelters. These signs display safety slogans and messages.

Type 8.

Temporary agricultural directional signs. These are temporary off-premise signs that provide directional information to places selling seasonal agricultural products.

Who regulates advertising signs?

Federal, state, and local governments all regulate advertising signs to some degree. The Federal Highway Beautification Act regulates signs visible from Federal-aid highways. All our state highways are on the Federal-aid system, so the Highway Advertising Control Act regulates signs visible from Interstate highways and most state highways. Cities and counties regulate signs visible from local roadways, often as part of their zoning regulations.

The Highway Advertising Control Act designates the Department of Transportation as the state agency responsible for matters pertaining to signs visible from state highways.

What are the advertising sign regulations?

The Highway Advertising Control Act is written in the manner of environmental law, and is rather complex. The regulations mostly specify what may be done with signs, rather than what may not be done; and that signs must comply with both state and city or county sign regulations, whichever is more restrictive.

The regulations also consider the level of outdoor advertising a driver might expect to see within a particular roadside environment. The opportunity to install a sign varies depending upon whether a sign is intended for view from an Interstate, primary, or scenic system highway, and the extent of visible commercial or industrial development in the area.

Generally, on-premise signs have restrictions on size and the number of signs visible to approaching traffic. The Highway Advertising Control Act does not regulate on-premise signs visible to primary state highways within commercial or industrial areas or corporate limits.

Off-premise signs generally are limited to commercial or industrial areas, have size restrictions, and a prescribed minimum spacing between signs depending on the type of state highway. The Highway Advertising Control Act also requires that off-premise advertising signs be erected through a permit system administered by the Department of Transportation. The permit must be in hand prior to erecting a sign.

View the complete Highway Advertising Control Act through the link provided at the Department of Transportation's website: <http://wsdot.wa.gov/operations/traffic>

What is the penalty for violating the advertising sign regulations?

The Highway Advertising Control Act declares that any sign erected or maintained contrary to its provisions is a public nuisance. The Highway Advertising Control Act also specifies an abatement process, but further declares that failure to remove an illegal sign within 15 days after notification is a misdemeanor.

The Department of Transportation is authorized to remove illegal signs erected on state highway right-of-way, without notice, and routinely does so.

Who do I talk to?

The Department of Transportation outdoor advertising representative at its Headquarters office is available to answer questions and help interpret the regulations. Phone the department's outdoor advertising representative in Olympia at (360) 705-7296.



Motorist Information sign (logo's) program.



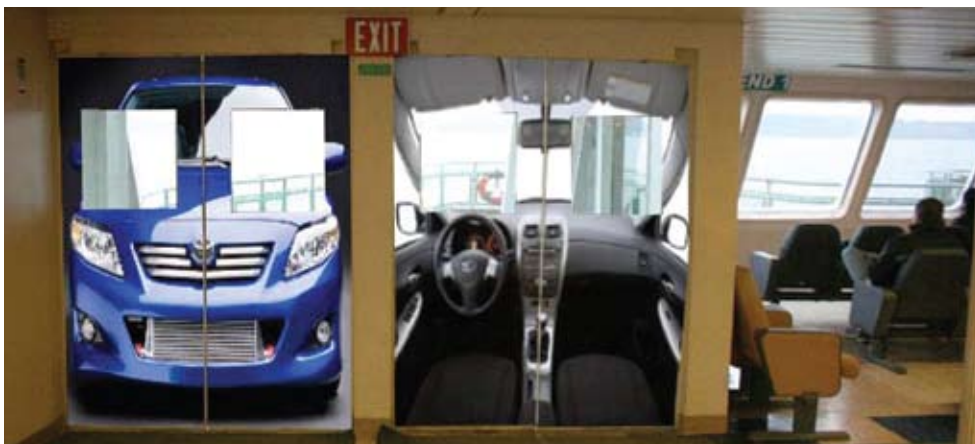
Safety Rest Area display.



Safety Rest Area display.



WSF digital media, brochure and tabloid racks.



WSF photomural wall creations.

What are the options to advertising signs?

The Department of Transportation provides the business community with access to three other advertising options.

- One option is the familiar Motorist Information Sign (logo's) program. Where sign space is available, business logos may be displayed for the essential motorist services of gas, food, lodging, camping, recreation, pharmaceutical, and tourist-oriented activities.

Find more information about the logo sign program through the link at the

department's website: <http://wsdot.wa.gov/biz/trafficoperations/traffic/logosigns.htm>.

- The Department of Transportation's safety rest areas also provide advertising opportunities through a display program operated by the private sector.

Contact Storeyco, Inc., phone (360) 412-0066 or toll free at 1-800-558-7867, or visit Storeyco's website at www.storeyco.com.

- The third option provides an advertising opportunity on new digital media, and

brochure and tabloid distribution racks, aboard Washington State Ferries and at the terminals. Certified Folder Display Service, Inc. operates the program. Contact Weldon Vittitow or Jill Andrews, phone (206) 870-2470, or visit their website at www.CertifiedFolder.com.

Washington State Ferries also enjoys a comprehensive advertising program through large photomurals and promotional programs intended to bring value to their 24 million annual riders. T4Media operates this program and can be reached at (206) 283-4440.

